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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - NEXT STEPS FOR SOMALILAND

REF: A. NAIROBI 1926

[B](#). NAIROBI 1834

[C](#). NAIROBI 1719

Classified By: Counselor for Somalia Affairs Bob Patterson for reasons
1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Since the July 27 decision by the National Electoral Commission and President Riyale to throw out the voter registration list, Somaliland has been embroiled in a political crisis. In recent weeks, this crisis has escalated into violent confrontation between a presidential administration seemingly willing to do anything necessary to remain in power and opposition supporters. International and indigenous mediation efforts are ongoing. The administration appears to be targeting domestic efforts with cash and promises of future rewards in order to ensure an outcome in its favor. September 23 conversations with the Speaker, Somaliland Foreign Minister, and the leaders of the two opposition parties suggest that there is agreement on general principles for a way forward, but continuing divergence on the all-important details. The USG, in concert with international partners, could break the political deadlock by pressuring President Riyale and his inner circle to address legitimate opposition party concerns. End summary.

Public Pushed Toward
The Tipping Point

[1](#)2. (C) Somaliland's tradition of relative peace and pride in consensus politics was weakened by the September 12 killing by the police of four and the wounding of several demonstrators in Hargeisa (ref a). The disproportionate force deployed by security officials and indiscriminate shooting at unarmed protesters seemed to have shocked the general public and mobilized many against a government that is increasingly characterized as "tyrannical" and "dictatorial." All of our interlocutors agreed that Riyale and his inner circle were willing to do virtually anything necessary to hold on to power, even at the price of Somaliland's hard-earned relative stability. The opposition tells us that if the administration makes no concessions, it risks plunging the region into more violence.

[1](#)3. (C) The nationwide peaceful protests of September 6 seemed to signal a new era in Somaliland's political maturity. Underlying the peaceful protest, however, was extreme dissatisfaction, particularly among the youth, with the entrenched political elite. Many Somalilanders are now calling for a caretaker government instead of allowing

President Riyale to remain in office until the elections can be re-scheduled. At a September 16 meeting, "non-political" Somalilanders working in Nairobi were adamant that only a newly-appointed caretaker government would be acceptable. In Hargeisa, our conversations with representatives from the opposition parties were less categorical. Faisal Warabe of UCID appears to still be amenable to a "technical extension" in order to organize the elections. But "Silanyo" and others within the Kulmiye party insist that Riyale will never allow elections to be held, especially elections that would be free or fair. At the same time, there is public pressure on all parties to reach a consensus on the way forward and many believe that a "technical" extension for a reasonable amount of time to organize elections would be the least destabilizing compromise.

Mediation Efforts Continue:
Undermined by Cash Payoffs

14. (C) Several mediation efforts are ongoing, with journalists, scholars, traditional elders, parliamentary committees, and the Guurti trying to break the political impasse (ref b). All of our contacts in the opposition parties, civil society, and elsewhere expressed reservations about the Government of Ethiopia's mediation effort. They told us that the GOE had never been an "honest broker." Most suspected that it was working to advance the government's cause, including pushing for an unconditional one-year extension for Riyale. Some Embassy interlocutors maintain

NAIROBI 00002009 002 OF 004

that "home grown" mediation efforts have always been Somaliland's hallmark and are more likely to succeed. While many of those groups leading self-declared mediation efforts have the best intentions, their efforts are not coordinated, may be at cross purposes, and are highly susceptible to clan and other influences.

15. (C) Both the upper and lower houses of parliament are leading mediation efforts. Several of our Hargeisa-based contacts alleged to us that President Riyale's inner circle is offering MPs from opposition parties in the House of Representatives a rumored USD 10,000 each to call off the impeachment motion tabled on September 5. We have elsewhere heard that several representatives in the Guurti (House of Elders) have negotiated payments of USD 5,000 each to table and support a motion for an extension of Riyale's presidential term. With state revenues dwindling, there are reports that Riyale's coterie has extorted money from the Somaliland-based business community by threatening to close down their operations if they refused to pay. It is widely rumored that the administration has committed substantial sums from all sources to maintain its hold on power.

International Efforts

16. (C) Throughout the voter registration process and during preparations for Somaliland's elections, the Somalia Unit worked closely with other donors. Through the Somaliland Democratization Committee, Nairobi-based missions have issued joint press statements about the political crisis. Most Somalilanders tell us they have appreciated the international community's statements, but tell us that it is not enough. Our contacts have encouraged the USG and its partners to take a stronger stance against the government's efforts to undermine the electoral process. They have asked us to help identify the most "legitimate" mediation track and support efforts to negotiate a political compromise.

Current State-of-Play:
Agreement Close but

Disagreement on Details

¶7. (C) In September 23 telephone calls, the Somaliland Foreign Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, and the heads of the two opposition parties offered different versions of the current state-of-play. Foreign Minister Dualeh told Somalia Unit that agreement was at hand, and that a memorandum of understanding that would extend the term of President Riyale, call for adjusting the composition of the National Electoral Committee, and "fine tune" the voter registration list would be signed imminently.

¶8. (C) UCID Chairman Faisal Warabe disagreed. He hinged his party's agreement on the incumbent government's willingness to add ministers from opposition parties to its mix, agree to an extension of no more than four months to Riyale's term, and accept that there would be no further postponements of the presidential elections. Warabe hoped that any three-party pact would be agreed by the international community. The government's failure to agree, Warabe guessed, could lead to further street clashes.

¶9. (C) Kulmiye Chairman Silanyo stipulated in a September 23 conversation that elections would have to be held as soon as possible, with the election timetable to be established by an independent technical committee backed by the international community. Silanyo said that his party would not accept the six-month extension of Riyale's term reportedly under consideration in the Guurti.

¶10. (C) On September 23, Speaker of Parliament Abdirahman Abdullahi "Irro" encouraged us to urge all parties to suspend parliamentary proceedings on the impeachment motion and on the Guurti move to extend Riyale's term for one year. The Speaker cautioned that Riyale is pressuring the Guurti to vote on the extension in the next two days, telling his supporters that this position is advocated by the international community. "Irro" favors continued mediation, international support, and additional time for the parties to

NAIROBI 00002009 003 OF 004

reach consensus.

UNPOS Not Acceptable as Mediator

¶11. (C) In September, the UN Political Office for Somalia made two trips to Hargeisa, with Deputy SRSG Charles Petrie leading the first delegation and SRSG Ould-Abdallah traveling to Hargeisa a few days later. UNPOS has not assumed the lead on any formal mediation efforts. Swedish Special Envoy Joran Bjallerstedt told us that the EU is reluctant to have UNPOS take the lead and is unwilling to go to Hargeisa as part of a combined international donor mission led by the UN. Many believe that UNPOS has not been sufficiently engaged with Somaliland and has little political capital to spend there. With no clear international lead on mediation it may be more effective for us to maintain pressure on key officials within the government. We may do this behind the scenes in conjunction with our international community partners, including through press interviews.

Levers of Influence

¶12. (C) All of our partners in the Nairobi-based international donor group agree that it is time for us to collectively take a more active role in helping to resolve Somaliland's political crisis, but we have not yet reached a consensus on how to proceed. At the same time, at our last meeting on September 11, all expressed a willingness to deliver a tougher message to Riyale. The challenge has always been how to enforce adherence to eventual agreements among

the key stakeholders. Suggested enforcement tools have included the UN Monitoring Group, threats of sanctions, and the withholding of international assistance to the administration's security sector.

¶13. (C) Several months ago, President Riyale sent his family to France, where he owns property (he also reportedly has several houses in Djibouti and Kenya), a signal to some that he is willing to pursue his political ambitions to the bitter end. Key advisors, like the Minister of Finance, also have extensive financial holdings. Riyale's inner circle, including the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, travel extensively. These key players might be highly susceptible to a clear message that they could be the target of sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, if they continue to undermine the political process.

In an August meeting, a senior government advisor identified key members of the Riyale's inner circle (ref c) who could be targeted. Of course, pressure must also be placed on the two main opposition leaders, and key figures within the NEC and Parliament.

¶14. (C) Other levers could include the "carrot" of increased international assistance to Somaliland, with adherence to the rule of law a condition for undertaking key programs. In recent weeks, there are reports that, on orders from President Riyale, the Minister of Interior has diverted key security assets from Somaliland's Special Protection Unit and the police, in order to suppress public gatherings. The international community could make clear that it will suspend payment to the police force if they continue to be used in that manner.

Pressuring Riyale to Resign

¶15. (C) Clan elders from Riyale's own minority Gadobirsey clan are pressuring him to immediately change his behavior. We understand that clan sultans told Riyale that he has become the major cause of the political crisis and that he could lose their support. Despite his minority status, Riyale enjoys considerable support from the dominant Issak clan - some of whom were slow to criticize Riyale in order to avert a backlash from Somaliland's minority groups. In recent months however, Riyale's support reportedly has waned both within his own clan and among the Issak leaders who have supported his regime. On September 18, an influential business leader from Riyale's clan told us pressure was

NAIROBI 00002009 004 OF 004

succeeding and that Riyale reportedly told clan elders that he was willing to resign if it would help end the stalemate.

¶16. (C) Several of our contacts have said that since the USG was instrumental in encouraging former President Abdullahi Yusuf and former Prime Minister Gedi to resign from their offices, we should exert similar influence in Somaliland. They also mentioned that Riyale's past indicates that he is willing to liberally employ state resources to the detriment of his own people. (Note: From 1988 to 1999 Riyale was a high-ranking intelligence officer in the National Security Services under then-President Siad Barre. Riyale was implicated in civil liberties and human rights abuses. End note.) Riyale's critics point to his history, including the four extensions of his term in office that he has engineered, to demonstrate that Somaliland's president will put his own interests before that of his people.

Comment

¶17. (C) At this juncture, the U.S. could play a critical supporting role in helping solve Somaliland's political crisis, and by extension preserving stability in the region.

By encouraging indigenous efforts to pressure key actors behind the scenes, we can help break the deadlock. One of the key sticking points continues to be what will occur at the end of Riyale's term in office. By encouraging all actors to immediately return to the table to negotiate next steps, especially on the National Electoral Committee and the voter registration list, we can help get the elections back on track. The UK has pledged financial support for electoral experts and we have already discussed with our partners the feasibility of immediate help to the political parties as these issues are negotiated. The goal would be to establish a firm timeline for the presidential election. Our highest priority is that Somaliland remains stable, and we believe that an election based on all-party consensus, freely reached, and with buy-in from the public, is the best way to achieve that goal.

RANNEBERGER